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By Sgt. Edward Eagerton

Alaska Guardsmen participate in annual marksmanship competition

JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska — Approximately 40 Soldiers and Airmen with the Alaska National Guard participated in the Alaska National Guard's 2014 Adjutant General's Match, here, June 7-8.

The TAG Match is an annual event that tests the participants' marksmanship skills in a battle-focused environment.

"The 2014 Alaska National Guard TAG Match represents an opportunity for the finest marksman in the Alaska National Guard to get together every year and compete for a place on the state marksmanship team," said Capt. Jesse Schexnayder, assistant state training officer, Joint Forces Headquarters, Alaska Army National Guard. "It also is a chance for those essential military skills to be passed down to up and coming Soldiers and Airmen looking to improve far beyond just meeting the minimum qualification standards."

The competition consists of four disciplines that include pistol, rifle, light machinegun, and sniper skillsets, explained Kennedy. With 40 participants this year, the AKNG focused on the M9 pistol and the M16 rifle.

In previous years, the competition has had as many as 200 participants, explained Schexnayder.

"We're encouraging everybody to come out and shoot," said Master Sgt. Andrew Kennedy, senior operations sergeant, JFHQ, Alaska Army National Guard. "Sometimes you can take a guy that has no experience and turn him into a well-experienced shooter in little time."

During the match, the shooters lined up on the rifle and pistol ranges with the Chugach mountains towering above in the backdrop. On the rifle range, eight Soldiers and Airmen stood a short distance from the 400 meter line, a ten-round magazine in their hands.

Following the instructions of the range safety officer, they loaded their weapons. Upon the sounding of the horn, the shooters had two minutes to sprint to the firing line and engage

their targets from the prone position. At two minutes, the RSO sounded the horn again, and the shooters cleared their weapons.

They continued moving up the line, shooting in timed increments from various distances and positions, until at 50 meters, they engaged their targets with only three seconds at that distance.

Like the rifle range, the shooters at the pistol range were timed and shot at various distances from different positions. After each iteration, the shooters checked their targets and assessed their performance.

After the competition ended, the data from each of the shooters was evaluated, and the top four-person teams for each of the events were announced at an awards ceremony. In the individual category, the top ten shooters were announced and given the opportunity to compete in the national level.

"This is a state level competition, and if they do well, they can go down to the Professional Education Center in Little Rock, Arkansas," said Kennedy. "There, they compete against 54 states and territories. There's a big exchange of ideas of tactics and techniques. You get a lot of cross training and a lot of experience."

The first-place overall team score was awarded to the 213th Space Warning Squadron of the Air National Guard team from Clear Air Force Base. The 213th SWS team was also the first place team in 2013.

Senior Airman Justin Smith from the 213th SWS took first place in the individual category with a score of 430 out of 600.

"To all the shooters, to all the range personnel, and to all those who worked behind the scenes to make this happen, know that you have our gratitude," said Schexnayder at the ceremony. "We look forward to establishing the TAG Match as a strong tradition in the Alaska Guard."

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